

**Local Administration of Social Assistance  
Programs in Russia**

By

Burton Richman and Raymond Struyk

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(revised)

Mr. Struyk is a Senior Fellow at the Urban Institute, Washington, DC. Between 1992 and October 1998 he was the resident director of the Housing Sector Reform Program in Russia. Mr. Richman, the former Director of Temporary Assistance Programs for the Virginia Department of Social Services, is currently resident director of the Local Government Social Sector Reform Program in Moscow. The field work reported upon herein was conducted under the Social Sector Reform Project, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The authors thank to reviewers for very helpful comments on a draft of the paper. The opinions expressed are the authors' and not necessarily those of the Urban Institute or USAID.

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## **Abstract**

Competent administration is fundamental to successful reform of social assistance programs in transition economies. Only with such administration is there assurance that benefits are being delivered as intended in enabling legislation. Moreover, the perceived efficiency and fairness of administration influences the public's views of the new programs. In the Russian Federation local governments have primary responsibility for the administration of social assistance programs enacted by all levels of government.

This paper presents the results of surveying nine offices charged with administering social assistance programs in four Russian municipalities. The accent is on the basics of program administration and management. Topics studied include client flow, eligibility verification procedures, the presence of a procedures manual for in-take workers, quality control procedures, and training. The findings are sobering and emphasize the need for the Russian government to assist municipalities to strengthen their administrative capacity through a combination of exhortation and leadership, provision of written guidance materials—on good administrative practices and program-specific regulations and procedures—and a national program of seminars for supervisors of various programs.

The sharp decentralization of fiscal and administrative responsibilities in the former Soviet bloc is one of the cardinal characteristics of the transition period. The record of the sharply expanded role of local government in governance and service delivery is well documented (Kirchner, 1999; Wallich 1994; Bird, Ebel, and Wallich, 1995; Baldersheim et al., 1996; Freinkman, Treisman, and Titov, 1999; Horvath, 2000). Decentralization has been much greater for program administration and service delivery than for program design and funding. But funding responsibility has often shifted more in reality than stated in the law because of unfunded and underfunded national mandates.<sup>1</sup> Examples of reformed programs that assign administration to local governments include the restructured child allowance programs in both Poland and Russia and the creation of housing allowances in a number of countries that permit phasing out rent controls in municipal housing (Struyk, 1996). Municipalities have some role in determining program parameters, e.g., in some countries the rate at which rents are increased in the housing allowance program; but program design is nonetheless substantially determined at the national level.

The decentralization and reorientation of government functions have required or will entail both the modification of existing local government agencies and the creation of new offices to administer programs transferred to localities, as well as some newly established programs. In Poland, for example, the decentralization of social assistance, which came into effect in January 1999, required the creation of new Family Assistance Centers in each of the country's over 350 districts (*Powiats*) (Regulski, 1999, p. 44).

At the national level in the Russian Federation, reform of social protection and delivery of social services has concentrated on design rather than field office administration. For example, within social protection most attention has gone to four groups of issues:

- documentation of the extent and patterns of poverty;
- changes in program design to improve targeting of benefits, including (a) the elimination of "benefits" assigned to many categories of citizens

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<sup>1</sup> Wallich (1994); Freinkman, Treisman, and Titov (1999) for Russia. Note that underfunding by the Russian national government initially places the burden on regional governments (Subjects of the Federation). But the regions are able to vary their contributions to local governments' revenues through an elaborate set of negotiations. In the end, municipalities can end up bearing much of the burden of the national-level funding shortfalls.

without regard to need (e.g., veterans of World War II) and (b) possible use of proxy means tests;

- analysis and design to address interrelations among various programs, e.g., child allowances, housing allowances, and family benefits; and,
- analysis of the desirability of a unified cash transfer system over multi-program systems.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the lack of attention to local program administration is to state that we have been able to identify only two papers reporting the results of carefully surveying actual service delivery (of either in-kind or cash benefit programs) for the countries of the former Soviet bloc. One addresses Armenia's cash transfer program and the other Russia's housing allowance program.<sup>3</sup> General reviews of the evolution of public administration practices and training in these countries has focused on developments at the national level.<sup>4</sup>

But there is general recognition that the administration of social protection programs inherited by Russia and other Soviet bloc countries from the old regime was weak, in part because such programs were a low priority. A World Bank (1999a, p.67) report lists the following problems:

- weak institutional coordination and an unclear division of labor among ministries and different levels of government;
- poorly trained staff;
- lack of incentives for staff;
- lack of flexibility and overly bureaucratic institutions;
- lack of transparency and communication with the public;
- limited budgeting and financial accounting capability;
- limited ability to forecast changes in economic conditions on program finance or coverage; and
- limited ability to monitor and verify claims.

Obviously, with this list of handicaps administrative reform can be ignored only at the peril of thwarting reform.<sup>5</sup> The best designed program that relies

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, McAuley (1994), Tacis (1998), Klugman (1997), Grootaert and Braithwaite (1998), World Bank (1999c) World Bank (1999d), Freinkman (1998).

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (1999b), Annex 8 for a summary; and Struyk, Puzanov and Kolodeznikova (forthcoming). In addition PADCO (1996a, 1996b) have investigated controlling fraud in the Ukrainian housing allowance program.

<sup>4</sup> Nunberg (1999a), Verheijen and Nemec (2000), Krawchenko (1997).

<sup>5</sup> Jabes (2000, p. 10) asserts that in Eastern Europe, "reform in most countries is characterized by the passing of laws, which are severely hampered by implementation deficits and enforcement gaps. These gaps are now systemic and serious throughout the region..."

upon local administration may fail to achieve its goals if basic skills, organization or commitment are lacking at the local level.

This paper presents the results of a survey of nine offices in four Russian cities responsible for delivering social services or making assistance payments. As detailed below, the findings are sobering and emphasize the need for the Russian government to assist municipalities to strengthen their administrative capacity through a combination of exhortation and leadership, provision of written guidance materials—on good administrative practices and program-specific regulations and procedures—and a national program of seminars for supervisors of various programs.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section outlines the methodology of the review. Following this, we overview the general organization of the delivery of social services and assistance in the four study cities and some aspects of the administrative environment. We also outline the basic principles governing program eligibility. The next section presents our findings on current administrative practices. A final section presents our recommendations for improvement.

### **Assessing Program Administration**

The assessment undertaken could be described as a diagnostic study—a comparatively quick examination of program administration to determine if there are problems present or incipient (Valadez and Bamberger, 1994, p. 163).<sup>6</sup> A limitation of this approach is that it is not a good design for assessing changes over time and especially the causes for changes that might be observed. The following points were examined:

#### In-take procedures

- Program access
- Client flow
- Verification procedures
- Interviews

Staff assignments, supervision and monitoring

Instructions/manuals and training

Client appeal procedures

Computerization

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<sup>6</sup> The procedure also has features in common with what Newcomer (1996, pp. 565-66) terms "economy and efficiency reviews" and "evaluability assessments" and with field office inspections (Glover, 1989). However, in our case there are few national program standards available to use in assessing performance.

## Management reporting

This section describes the sample of offices, data collection, and assessment undertaken.

**Method.** The assessment was designed to document current practices and to analyze the extent to which they comply with reasonable standards.

*Sample offices.* A sample of offices in four municipalities were purposively selected for inclusion. The municipalities were those that had volunteered to participate in an USAID -supported project aimed at improving the administration of social service and assistance programs operated by the municipalities. This basis for selection leads one to assume that these cities are more reform-oriented places, but one can infer much less about whether they had already adopted relatively progressive practices or whether they may have joined the program because they understood they were laggards. Moreover, while the mayor or deputy mayor who agreed to participate may be progressive, one should not transfer this attribute to offices that the team independently selected for inclusion in the sample.

The four municipalities--Tomsk (population, 480,000), Perm (1 million), Novgorod (230,000), and Arzamas (110,000)—represent a range of city sizes and regions of the country: Novgorod and Arzamas are in European Russia, Tomsk in Siberia, and Perm in the Urals. The sample covers a broad range of cities and regions—45 percent of Russians live in cities of 100,000 plus population, and 13 percent live further east and north of Tomsk. Nevertheless, we make no claim that our sample is representative, and consequently any generalizations should be made cautiously.

In each city agencies were selected to provide a broad overview of how social assistance and social service programs were administered in that city. The review *excludes* the actual delivery of services, e.g., home visits to disabled elderly or counseling to troubled teenagers. Nine offices in total were visited; three administer the housing allowance program:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Russian names for these agencies are

a. Arzamas

1. Munitsipalni Tsentri Sotsialnoi Pomoshchi Naselniyu
2. Otdel Zhitishchnykh Subsidiy
3. Komitet Po Voprosam Semyi

b. Novgorod

1. Sluzhba Subsidiy Zhitishchnoy-Kommunal'nogo Khozyaystva
2. Tsentri Pomoshchi Semye i Detyam

- a. Arzamas
  - 1. Municipal Center for Household Social Assistance
  - 2. Housing Allowance Office
  - 3. Family Committee
- b. Novgorod
  - 1. Housing Allowance Office
  - 2. Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children
- c. Perm
  - 1. District Social Protection Agency
- d. Tomsk
  - 1. Department of Social Care – South District Office, Housing Allowance Branch only
  - 2. Office of Social Procurement (Child Allowance Program only)
  - 3. Department of Social Care – North District Office

Although the sample of offices is small, the consistency of the findings indicates that it is sufficient for a diagnostic study.

*Data collection.* Interviews were conducted by one of the authors at all of the sample offices following an interview guide.<sup>8</sup> Notes were taken by hand during the interview and transcribed shortly thereafter by the interviewer into more complete statements. Where questions arose about what had been said, the interviewee was later asked for clarification. In every office the office head or deputy office head was interviewed. In two offices in - take workers were also interviewed.

Importantly, these interviews were part of a more general data acquisition program in each city, which involved a several month interactive process with local officials on programs in the city. Information was gathered on the responsible agency for each program, rules determining beneficiary eligibility, benefit levels and form (cash, in-kind), the level of government controlling these factors, number of beneficiaries, total expenditures on each program, and the source of funds for each program (Gallagher et al., 2000).

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- c. Perm
    - 1. Raionnyi Otdel Sotsialnoi Zashchity
  - d. Tomsk
    - 1. Upravleniye Sotsialnoi Zashchity Yuzhnogo Okrugah (Otdyel Zhilishchyykh Subsidyi)
    - 2. Otdel Sotsialnogo Obespecheniya (Rabota Poh Detskim Posobiyam)
    - 3. Upravleniye Sotsialnoi Zashchity Severnogo Okrugah

<sup>8</sup> On training interviewers for such interviews and conducting them, see Patton and Sawicki (1996), pp. 97-107, and Hatry et al. (1981), pp. 90-91. Also see Newcomer (1996, pp. 562-63) for commentary on possible biases in responses.

Difficulties were encountered in obtaining some program data. In a number of offices the supervisor did not have precise information; and in other cases it was unclear, even after probing, whether the information existed in records or whether the office director was simply not informed about it. Respondents often relied on their judgements rather than written records in answering.<sup>9</sup> We sent the completed descriptions of office operations to each office supervisor for correction and comment, and we incorporated these corrections into our data base.

Overall, the data can be classified into two parts in terms of quality.<sup>10</sup> Quality is good for information on the presence of procedures as indicated by the existence of documents, handbooks and the like. Quality is weaker, usually much weaker, for quantitative information requested on various aspects of operations.

A major weakness of the assessment is that program participants were not interviewed about their experiences with the administrative elements with which they had had contact. Project resources simply were insufficient to add this task. Possible bias from getting only one side of the story should be kept in mind as results are presented. The absence of participant interviews also means that we were unable to inquire about possible corruption in program administration, particularly the applicants having to make payments in cash or in kind to gain admission to a program. However, given the often very small benefits involved and the low incomes of beneficiaries, it is likely that corruption of this type is petty—a box of chocolates, a bouquet of flowers given to “grease the wheels.” But more systemic corruption, e.g., carrying fictitious beneficiaries on the rolls, is possible.

Local offices in each city administer three types of programs. First is a set of locally designed and funded programs. Then there are two groups of nationally -funded programs. Following the taxonomy of Subbaro et al. (1997), these are (a) those where the local government has significant administrative discretion (e.g., housing allowances) and (b) those where the local government is the agent of the national government (e.g., child

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<sup>9</sup> The limitations of self-monitoring data and key informant opinions are well-known (Valadez and Bamberger, 1994, pp. 353-54; Kumar, 1989, p.4; Hummel, 1994, pp. 225-45).

<sup>10</sup> Broadly, we followed the procedures outlined in Patton and Sawicki (1996, pp. 109-113) to assess quality.



allowances). Most national programs fall into the second category. In reality, however, there is little national ministry or Subject of the Federation oversight of local administration of these programs.

In reviewing practices found in these offices, we compare them with what are viewed as good practices for executing similar tasks in Western countries; the U.S. is our particular point of reference. Admittedly this does not make allowances for cultural differences. But, based on personal observation, such differences seem quite modest in large Russian cities compared with their western neighbors. Russian social assistance applicants do appear to be prepared to queue longer and to tolerate less privacy in interview settings than western counterparts; but they also appear generally less willing to be open about their financial situations.

### **Organization, Programs Administered, and Eligibility**

**Administrative structure.** Diversity is the catch word to describe arrangements on the ground. Each city is organized differently in the way it administers social assistance programs. In part this results from the agreement reached between the oblast and the municipality as to which programs the municipality administers on behalf of the *oblast*.<sup>11</sup>

In Arzamas and Novgorod the Housing Allowance Program is administered outside of the Social Protection network, while in Tomsk and Perm the program is administered by the agency that administers several of the other benefit programs in the city.

In Novgorod and Arzamas, social assistance agencies were created based on the household category to be assisted, i.e. pensioners, disabled adults and children, and families and children; and each center provides both benefits and services for that particular population. In Arzamas the Municipal Center for Household Social Assistance provides assistance or services to pregnant women, disabled diabetics, members of Chernobyl liquidating teams, pensioners, low-income families, handicapped adults who are not pensioners, and handicapped children. This center also processes

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<sup>11</sup> In the Russian Federation, the highest level of subnational government is called a Subject of Federation, of which there are 89. These consist of *oblasts*, *krais*, republics, autonomous *orkugs*, one autonomous *raion*, and two cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg) that have Subject status. Although formally they are equal in their powers, separate treaties between the "federal center" and some of the Subjects of the Federation (mostly republics) signed under President Yeltsin give the latter more budget autonomy.

applications for in-kind food assistance and monetary assistance to households in crisis. The Municipal Center is complemented by the Arzamas Family Committee which administers the Birth and Child Allowance programs.

Similarly, the Novgorod Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children administers a broad range of programs. But it also administers the federal Child Allowance Program, and provides coupons to low-income families for meals at canteens. The Center has a single location and all applications are taken there.

In Perm and Tomsk assistance is organized by geographical district, rather than population category. In Perm, the city is divided into seven districts (*raions*) and each district has a comprehensive benefit office that takes applications and provides benefits for most programs for all populations. Each district office administers assistance programs for pregnant women, families with many children, disabled children, children with disabled parents, and families with only one parent. The Perm district office also handles all benefit programs for pensioners and disabled adults. (Each district also has a comprehensive service center that provides most services to all populations in the district.)

The city of Tomsk has two district offices that handle all social protection programs administered by the city. The oblast also has four offices in Tomsk that handle those programs administered by the oblast. The city has responsibility for administering housing allowances, veteran's benefits, benefits to single parent families, and families with disabled children. The oblast office administers the Child Allowance Program, pensions, and some smaller benefits such as those for victims of the Chernobyl disaster.

Coordination of referrals between agencies and collection of data is also different in each city. In Novgorod each agency maintains its own database, and information is not routinely shared between agencies in a formal manner. In Arzamas and Perm at least limited data sharing is routine. In Arzamas, each office has its own data base which it regularly updates with information from data bases of other agencies. In Perm the benefit office and service office in each district have a common data base and routinely share information, and they have a good process for referral of

households between offices. There is, however, little or no sharing of information across district boundaries.

**Work environment.** Analyses of well-performing government agencies argue that several factors concerning incentives, motivation, and professionalism can influence performance levels (Hilderbrand and Grindle, 1997). Such factors include recruitment procedures, level of compensation, presence of performance standards, basis for promotions, and the quality and quantity of office space and the equipment with which staff have to work. The record across the studied offices is discouraging on these points.

Salaries are modest at best. Table 1 shows the monthly wage of an in-take worker as a percent of the per capita subsistence level in each city. The subsistence level is defined for each location using a standard methodology. As the name implies, this is the income necessary for a minimally adequate diet and other living expenses. In spring 2000, the highest per capita subsistence level among the four cities was the equivalent of \$1 per day.

**Table 1**  
**In-take Staff Salaries as a Percent of Local Per Capita**  
**Subsistence Income Level**

City	Salary as % of monthly subsistence income
Arzamas	111
Novgorod	49
Perm	46
Tomsk	176

The figures in the table show that in no city would one call these workers well paid. Indeed, in Novgorod and Perm it is likely that the family incomes of some of the workers are less than those of the people receiving the subsidies these workers administer. Such low salaries could well undermine worker morale. Interestingly, in Novgorod, Perm, and Arzamas the wages of housing allowance office in-take workers are 12, 190, and 240 percent higher than those in the social assistance offices.

Recruitment is generally an *ad hoc* affair. Possibilities for favoritism are wide. Only an agency in Arzamas reported advertizing when a position was open and administering a test as part of the review process. Formal staff

evaluation is essentially absent, with the exception of one office where workers have short-term contracts and performance must be at least implicitly reviewed before the contract is renewed. A similar situation exists for promotions; but since the organizations are usually completely flat in structure—all workers report to the office head—there is little scope for promotion in any case. Only the Perm office, the Arzamas Municipal Center, and the Novgorod housing allowance office have scope for internal promotion.

Finally, as discussed further below, offices are cramped; and equipment, even of the most rudimentary types (staplers, scotch tape, file folders, even paper), is generally scarce. In short, by western standards the work environment would be judged as extremely difficult and not one that would help motivate workers to high performance. Despite this, the staff interviewed and observed appeared reasonably motivated in their jobs.

**Program eligibility.** Broadly there are two structures for determining eligibility for social assistance and social services. In most programs eligibility is independent of income but requires a person to be in a specified category. The categories themselves are of two types: (a) needy individuals, e.g., disabled persons, unmarried mothers, and (b) individuals who have rendered or are rendering special service to the country, e.g., veterans of World War II but also police and judicial officials and members of the active duty military. (The subsidies to the militia, judiciary, military and similar groups are used as a disguised wage supplement.) Those in certain categories qualify for different programs. This is essentially the system in place at the end of the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> But during the transition the State Duma has very substantially increased eligibility for various benefits—free travel on local public transportation and discounted payments for housing rents and utility payments.

In recent years, as municipal budgets have been strained by un- and under-funded federal mandates, many municipalities have adopted a “double screen.” Persons who qualify for a program based on the categories are subject to a income test screen to determine eligibility (Gallagher et al., 2000).

The idea of income testing became a reality with the implementation of the national housing allowance program in 1994. This program has no

categorical screen and eligibility is based solely on income. While there are federal government guidelines on the definition of income for the program, local governments have the final responsibility for this definition and corresponding certification procedures.<sup>13</sup> The procedures for income-testing have generally much stricter in the housing allowance program than in other means-tested programs. Indeed, municipalities very seldom have uniform income definitions across the multiple programs they administer.<sup>14</sup>

In recent years the federal government has enacted laws to define “subsistence income,” a poverty-line measure, and the income sources to be counted in determining eligibility for some programs.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, we found sharp variance among the four cities and among programs within a city in income definitions and income eligibility levels.

### **Findings on Program Administration**

This section documents the administrative practices found in the sample offices. For each administrative area, we first give a summary statement and then we give specific examples from the four cities.

**In-take procedures – client flow.** The standard pattern is for applicants to receive attention on a first come – first served basis. Applicants are expected to bring with them documents verifying eligibility. In the case of missing documents, the applicant often must start the process from the beginning when he/she returns with the needed document. Usually in offices administering multiple programs applicants are referred to a specialist on the particular program. Typically those applying for multiple

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Braithwaite (1997); Connor (1997); World Bank (1994).

<sup>13</sup> Participants must also live in a qualifying type of housing, e.g., a privatized or state unit, coop, etc. and must not be in arrears on its rent payments. For details, see Struyk, Lee, and Puzanov (1997).

<sup>14</sup> More specifically, different income definitions and eligibility standards (as well as verification procedures) are defined for the housing allowance and child allowance programs. Among municipal programs, the programs administered by the social protection committee tend to have uniform definitions and standards. But different definitions and standards are often used for programs administered by other committees, e.g., kindergarten fees and prices for school lunches which are determined by the education committee.

<sup>15</sup> For example: Government of Russia Resolution No. 152 of February 2000, “Procedure for Recording and Counting Average per Capita Income of Low-Income Families and Low-Income Single Individuals;” Government of Russia Resolution No. 1096 of September 29, 1999, “Procedure for Recording and Counting the Average per Capita Income Eligible for a Monthly Housing Allowance;” Federal Law No. 134 of October 24, 1997, “On Subsistence Level in the Russian Federation.”

benefits see multiple staff and provide similar information to each.

Procedures vary among offices in the same city (see Tomsk below).

ARZAMAS: At the *Municipal Center for Household Social Assistance* the procedure is as just outlined. Normally benefits are provided quickly, sometimes the same day; but workers have 30 days to provide benefits to an approved household.

At the *Housing Allowance Office* the interviews are by appointment and take 15 - 30 minutes. If the applicant does not have all of the necessary documents with him at the time of the interview, he is told to get them; if possible, he can be seen again the same day. All cases are recertified once every 6 months.

NOVGOROD: The *Housing Assistance Program* has four offices; applicants must apply at the office serving their neighborhood. When the applicant arrives at the office, the receptionist registers him/her in a ledger and makes inquiries about the family's composition, income, and living conditions. The receptionist can tell the applicant if he/she is likely to be eligible and in a few minutes provides the applicant with a rough estimate of the size of the expected benefits. If it appears that the household will be eligible, the applicant receives a package of forms to be completed, including the application, and a model agreement that is to be studied by all family members so that they will be familiar with their contractual rights and obligations. The applicant is also given an appointment with an intake worker. Applications are by appointment only. Interviews take about 40 minutes. If the applicant is deemed unlikely to be eligible, the reason for the denial is given.

PERM: The workers at the district office of the *Social Protection Agency* are divided into three groups with each group handling different programs for different categories of households. When applicants come to the office, they see a receptionist whose sole responsibility is to tell them which group in the center they should visit. The applicant is then seen by the first available worker of that group. The worker is responsible for the determination of qualification category for each applicant and for the collection of the appropriate documents for the determination of eligibility. If the household must return to the office for a follow up visit, its information has already been entered into the computer. So rather than seeing the same worker they saw on their first visit, the next available worker in the group sees them.

TOMSK: At the *Department of Social Care – Southern District*, which also administers the Housing Allowance Program, applicants must come on a specific day reserved for residents of their sub-district to apply. Workers have access to a database that shows the kinds of aid people are receiving as well as employment and pension information. The interview takes only 2-3 minutes.

If the applicant arrives at the *North District Office of the Department of Social Care* on one of the three intake days per week, he is referred by a receptionist to one of three intake units in the office, i.e., housing

subsidies, veterans benefits, or programs for low income families. He is seen the same day. If he is interested in filing an application with more than one of these units, e.g., housing and programs for low income families, then he must see workers in both units and file separate applications with each of them. The interview with each worker seen is around 15 -20 minutes in length. If the applicant has all the necessary documents for the assistance for which he is applying, then the worker can take action on the case in a few days. If there are missing documents, then the applicant must return to the office with the correct documents before any action on the application(s) is taken.

At the *Office of Social Procurement*, which administers the Child Allowance Program, an applicant can apply on any workday. He/she is assigned to a worker, again by sub-district, and the interview takes five minutes to one hour.

### **In-take procedures – verification**

Verifications correspond to the two types of eligibility criteria: proof of being in a category of persons eligible for assistance and proof of the level of income received. With one important exception, the verifying documents are generally issued by government offices and bear the official stamp of the office as proof of its validity. The exception concerns earned income. Earnings are verified on a standard form stamped and issued by the employer. Income from self-employment is verified in a number of ways, including income tax returns. A major problem in income verification is identifying money earned from informal employment.

ARZAMAS: The *Municipal Center* will not take an application unless all verifications are provided. The verifications required are standardized and only certain types of verification are acceptable. For example, for earnings the certificate from the employer is the only acceptable form of verification and for unemployment benefits the applicant must have a certificate from the Center for Unemployment. The Center gets information on Child Allowance Households and the Social Allowance for Families with Low Income from the agency that administers those programs; so no additional verifications are required from households that already have been approved for those programs.

The *Housing Allowance Office* uses similar verification procedures. Its application is more detailed and collects information about income from a variety of sources on all household members. If the household does not have adequate verification when it applies, the application is held pending until the verifications are provided at which point the applicant receives benefits back to the date of the original application.

NOVGOROD: The *Housing Assistance Office* follows procedures similar to those just reviewed. If the worker has any doubts, a verification officer visits the applicant's home in order to examine the household's living conditions and to verify the number of persons living in the dwelling. The officer also interviews neighbors to corroborate the applicant's statements. The office can also require that the household provide additional documentation of its economic circumstances if it has reason to question the veracity of the information provided.

TOMSK: At the *Department of Social Care North District Office*, workers have a list of required documents for each application. The office requires the standard verification form from the applicant's enterprise. The office also has access to a data base from the unemployment office; so registration can be confirmed. They can also check with the tax department to see if the applicant is registered as an entrepreneur (usually done if the applicant declares little or no income).

**In-take procedure – interviews.** Without exception workers in all of the offices visited conduct their interviews in small offices in which anywhere from three to seven workers have their desks. Interviews can generally be heard by all present. There is no concept of client confidentiality.

**Staff assignments/supervision and monitoring.** Organization structures are generally flat, with workers reporting directly to the center director. For most centers the number of workers reporting to the director would make it virtually impossible for the director to provide any meaningful supervision. A few of the units do have an intermediate level of supervisors. But the standard situation is the complete absence of formal monitoring of decisions made by in-take workers and the calculation of benefits. Four offices do better than the others in these areas: the Novgorod Housing Assistance Office, the Arzamas Family Committee, the Arzamas Municipal Center, and the Tomsk Department of Social Care– North District Office.

ARZAMAS: The Arzamas *Municipal Center* has five staff who take applications and determine eligibility for benefit programs administered by the center. They report to the deputy director of the center who is responsible for hiring and training personnel. The deputy is responsible for checking all calculations and provides the staff with instructional materials on how to implement legislative and statutory requirements.

The Arzamas *Housing Allowance Office* has four workers who handle 1100 ongoing cases. The Office Director coordinates the work of the staff, ensures they have copies of all laws and regulations, organizes campaigns to inform city residents about the program, and prepares the necessary reports. There is no formal monitoring system in place.



All four staff sit in the same room with the director; so she feels that she knows what is going on in the office.

The *Family Committee office* has nine staff all of whom report directly to the office director. She maintains an open door policy and workers can come to her to consult on difficult cases or ask questions about policy and procedures. Every morning she receives an oral report from the senior worker on the previous day's work, discussing any problems that have come up. Workers are hired under contract (six months for new workers and three years for veteran workers); and each receives a performance review when her contract is up for renewal. The director expects her workers to be independent and to make their own decisions.

The Center director and the head bookkeeper review all approved applications before they are processed for payment. The center director ensures that the case record is complete and that all necessary documents are in the case file and that they are originals. The head bookkeeper checks all of the manual calculations to ensure they are correct. No statistics are kept on the number of errors found. Once every six months inspectors from the Department of Finance read 10 percent of the cases for correctness. The scope of this review was not clear and there were no statistics on errors available.

NOVGOROD: The *Housing Assistance Office* has 29 workers which includes three calculation teams each headed by a senior officer (supervisor), ten managing officers, four verification officers, and four receptionists. Managing officers are assigned to keep files on all households eligible to receive allowances.

This was the only office visited that had true supervisors for the eligibility function. The senior officers are responsible for regularly checking all files in the office to ensure that they are correct. Their main task is to ensure timely and accurate processing of applications and benefit delivery to program participants. They also supervise the day-to-day work of their subordinates and provide staff with assistance on difficult cases. The Office head keeps no statistics on errors but mistakes are penalized.<sup>16</sup>

TOMSK: The *South District Office*, which also administers the Housing Allowance Program, has 23 workers all of whom report to the center director. She performs no monitoring function for case quality.

The *Department of Social Care North District Office* has 21 staff all of whom report directly to the office head. The benefit workers are divided into three units, housing subsidies, veterans' benefits, and programs for low income families, and are further subdivided in the latter two by specific groupings of programs or categories. Each unit has a lead worker who both carries a caseload and provides assistance to the other workers, primarily answering questions and

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<sup>16</sup> For the period of July 1994 through May 2000 there were several cases where workers were denied bonuses because of serious errors made by them, but none of them was terminated for this reason.

helping them with complicated cases. The office head requires a monthly report from each worker detailing the number of families served and the benefits provided to each applicant household. The office head uses these reports to make an office wide report to the Head of the Social Protection Committee.

Two accountants in the office do case monitoring. They review cases in each program twice a year attempting to read 70 percent of all cases. They make a special effort to review the cases of new workers. Each case review is written up; if an error is found, the case is returned to the worker for correction. The review consists of a check on all procedures, e.g., were the correct documents received, was income from the correct period used to calculate eligibility or benefits, etc.? No statistics on errors, however, are maintained though the accountant said that no calculation errors were made in 1999. The office is also occasionally audited by the Oblast Prosecutor's office to determine whether rehabilitation cases are in conformance with Oblast law. No statistics on findings were available.

**Instructions/manuals and training - new and ongoing.** While most workers have access to the laws that created the programs they administer, the laws often do not provide the level of detail that a worker needs to evaluate a family's situation to determine that family's eligibility for benefits provided by that law. Workers at some offices have some documentation beyond laws at their desks. In no city, however, do offices have a comprehensive manual for workers on all program rules and procedures for doing their job. The best procedures are generally in offices administering housing allowances, probably owing to the fact that a comprehensive procedures manual was widely distributed by the responsible Russian Federation ministry when the program became operational.

Formal training is truly exceptional, especially for new workers. Absent is general orientation training in the philosophy of the program, where the program fits in the overall safety net, and the goals of the office and its view of its relation to its clients. Often new staff are trained/mentored by an experienced co-workers. There is some formal training for staff on program changes.

ARZAMAS: The *Municipal Center* workers do not have procedural manuals for the programs they administer. The only written guidance workers are provided is a copy of the laws and regulations for the programs in an 8-10 page pamphlet that each worker keeps at her desk. The Assistant Director of the Center is responsible for tracking any changes to the laws and meets with the staff every Friday to go over anything that is new or has changed.

The *Housing Allowance Office* workers do not have manuals per se, but they do have significant documentation. They each keep a small notebook with the instructions and regulations that are issued by the Mayor's office for their program. There is no formal classroom training available for new workers; they learn on the job and by asking questions of other workers in the office. There is sometimes formal training offered by the Oblast in Nizhny Novgorod, but most of the time training on how to implement new regulations is handled over the phone with the Oblast office.

NOVGOROD: Workers at the *Housing Assistance Office* do not have formal manuals. The staff are provided copies of laws and regulations affecting the program. All office staff also meet weekly to discuss difficulties and problems that arose over the past week and ways to deal with such problems in the future, in accordance with the applicable legislation. When new workers are hired, the senior officers are responsible for training them in the program and their particular responsibilities.

PERM: Workers have a collection of laws, regulations and instructions at their desks. Each worker maintains her own collection; so the contents vary. For new local laws and regulations, the program specialist at the Social Protection Committee headquarters writes instructions for workers on how to implement the law or the change in the law. The instructions are distributed to the offices via email. The Center has a law database with the relevant laws on it and the worker can go to the computer (usually not in the same office) and look up the law if they have a question. The database contains over 150 laws.

The central office specialist also conducts training for regular staff when there is a law change. The center has also begun to do some cross training so workers can handle programs for different population groups. The specialist is responsible for training new workers on program rules. New workers shadow an experienced worker for a few days.

TOMSK: At the *Department of Social Care North District Office*, each worker is expected to keep a file of documents for the programs with which they work. These include copies of laws and regulations from the federal, oblast and local level, as well as notes on how forms are to be completed or other complex policies. Workers are responsible for keeping their folders up to date as laws and regulations change, and the only notes they have in their folders are those they have written themselves from training sessions and consultations with the lead worker.

New workers receive no formal classroom training. When hired they are placed on probation for three months while working with the lead worker to learn the job. Veteran staff do receive training on new or altered laws and regulations from either the City Committee on Social Protection for local laws, or the Oblast Committee on Social Protection for oblast laws. When training is provided it is obligatory for all workers to attend.

**Appeal Procedures.** Only three cities have some form of process in place for clients to appeal adverse decisions made by in-take workers. Tomsk does not. Frequently, a two-tier appeals process is in place, with the second level involving high level officials. Information on the frequency of use of these procedures was not available.

ARZAMAS: The *Family Committee, Municipal Center and the Housing Allowance Office* all use the same appeal procedure. All clients must file their appeals with a city Commission that is chaired by the Head of the Social Committee. The Director of the Senior Center is also on the Commission. The decision of the Commission is final. The Committee keeps a hand written record notebook of appeals. Since 1997 there have been 150 appeals filed and in 99 percent of the cases the agency's decision was upheld.

NOVGOROD: At the *Housing Assistance Office*, the client first appeals to the senior officer supervising the application procedure. If this fails, the appeal is moved up to the Director of the Agency who, together with the responsible senior officer, meets with the client. If the applicant is still dissatisfied, he may appeal to the Mediating Commission that meets twice a week. The Vice-Mayor is the chairman of the commission and has the final word on all decisions. The Commission's decisions can be appealed in court.

At the *Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children*, the first level of appeal is to the Center Director. She has the authority to overrule the decision of the worker. The next level of appeal is to a special committee chaired by the Head of the Social Committee. A client has 30 days to file a claim.

PERM: Clients in Perm who wish to appeal a decision of the District Office worker must file an appeal with the Municipal Commission for Assignment of Housing Subsidies for housing allowance issues and with the district level commissions for the assignment for social benefits, which are headed by the district deputy director of other benefit issues. The Housing Subsidies Commission has only investigated three complaints since it was founded in May, 1999 and it found in favor of the complainant all three times.<sup>17</sup>

TOMSK: The *North District Office of the Department of Social Care* has no appeal procedure. If a recipient complains to any level of government, the concerned office will investigate the complaint. In 1999 only one complaint was filed regarding the quality of wood that was provided under the free fuel program. It was found to be an invalid complaint.

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<sup>17</sup> District administrations keep statistics on appeals filed in their districts but these were not obtained.

**Computerization.** All offices visited have some degree of computerization. Systems for the most part acquire and maintain information on client households, although a few systems calculate eligibility and benefit levels for in-take workers. Some offices have local area networks in place, but most offices use stand-alone PC's. Computer data bases are generally not structured to be easily shared with other offices.

ARZAMAS: The *Municipal Center* has two PCs for all benefit workers. They enter data on all approved applications and also maintain a database on all pensioners in the city. The PCs are used to maintain the database and to determine eligibility and benefit levels.

The *Housing Allowance Office* also has one PC for its five workers. All data from the application are entered and the machine determines household eligibility. The Housing Office shares its data with other offices upon request, through the provision of diskettes or printouts containing the data requested.

NOVGOROD: The *Housing Assistance Office* is about 75 percent computerized. However, all officers assigned to interview applicants and all receptionists have a work station equipped with a computer and special software for the calculation of subsidy amounts. Each office has a LAN, with all PC's connected. In two of the offices the LAN is linked to the central Housing Allowance Office and they are in the process of being connected to the Department of Finance and the communal service provider of water and district heat. Additionally, the city is working to maintain a single data base for all housing assistance cases.

The *Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children* has one computer for the four benefit workers, and it is connected to a computer in the Office of the Social Committee. The computer maintains data on eligibility and benefits, but does not calculate these for the in-take worker. If programming changes are needed because of new regulations or laws, the staff at the center is responsible for modifying the programs. The Center maintains a paper file of all the data that are computerized.

PERM: Each of the seven districts in Perm has developed its own stand-alone computer system. There is no sharing of databases among the seven district offices. The *Social Protection Agency* and the social service agency in the same district do have access to each other's databases. Each district's system is different. Computers are used primarily for data collection and maintenance. Other than being able to print lists, the system does not work for the benefit of in-take and case management workers. The city's plan is to develop a comprehensive system for each district in the City, i.e., connecting to other agencies in the same district, and then to determine how to make the systems citywide.

TOMSK: The *North Office of the Social Care Department* has 16 computers for 21 workers. The system calculates benefits for all

municipal programs and for the housing subsidy program. It is used to maintain a data base on all recipient households and the benefits they receive. The programmers for the system work for the City Committee on Social Protection and are reported to be good at keeping the system up to date with any changes in regulations or laws. The office also has access to a data base on pensions and one from the unemployment office regarding who is registered there.

**Management Reporting.** Most of the Centers visited generate some information either manually or from computer databases. The most common report gives activity counts to the municipal committee to which the agency belongs. Additional reports are developed in response to the reporting requirements of federal or oblast agencies. The information is typically not tailored to the needs of office workers, supervisors, center directors, or the Head of the Social Committee. Computer databases for the most part were not developed specifically with management reporting as an objective. Nevertheless most of computer databases are fairly comprehensive and could be used to generate such reports.

Table 2 provides a simple summary of the practices just reviewed. Overall, it is clear that much improvement in basic office and program management is possible.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of Administrative Practices**

<b>Intake Procedures - Program Access and Client Flow</b> Number of offices where clients make appointments to file applications.	3 / 9
<b>Intake Procedures - Verification</b> 1. Number of offices that have standardized procedures regarding what must be verified.	9 / 9
2. Number of offices that give workers latitude in how information is verified, i.e. what are acceptable documents to verify client statements on the application.	1 / 9
<b>Intake Procedures - Interviews</b> 1. Number of offices that require interviews with applicants before providing benefits.	9 / 9
2. Number of offices that have special interview rooms or areas where client confidentiality can be kept.	0 / 9
<b>Supervision and Monitoring</b> 1. Number of offices that have positions at the supervisory level for benefit workers.	3 / 9
2. Number of offices that have any form of formal monitoring or worker case actions to determine if the determination of eligibility and calculation of benefit amount are correct.	4 / 9
<b>Procedural Manuals and Instructions</b> Number of offices that have formal instructional or procedural manuals for workers.	0 / 9
<b>Training</b> 1. Number of offices that have formal training for new workers.	3 / 9
2. Number of offices that provide formal training to veteran workers on new or changed laws and regulations.	5 / 9
<b>Client Appeals</b> Number of cities that have formal appeal procedures to use when clients are not satisfied with the decision made by the agency worker.	3 / 4
<b>Computerization</b> 1. Number of offices that have some degree of computerization.	9 / 9
2. Number of offices that have a PC for each worker.	1 / 9
3. Number of offices that computer systems that determine eligibility and calculate benefits.	5 / 9
4. Number of offices that have any connectivity with other agencies.	5 / 9
<b>Management Reporting</b> Number of offices that produce management reports designed to assist workers and administrators to do their jobs more efficiently or effectively.	0 / 9

### **What's to Be Done?**

Our response to this question has two parts. The first comments on the specific limitations in some of the administrative practices just reviewed. In other words, what could these agencies do to increase the efficiency and professionalism with which they administer their programs. The second takes a broader view of actions that could be taken at the national level to make improvements in the delivery of social assistance and social services more generally.

#### **Specific responses**

*Administrative Structure and Work Environment.* Beyond the call for more and better-deployed computers and more privacy for in -take interviews

made below, we have only two recommendations in this area. The first is directed to the broad organization of assistance agencies, e.g., the centralized versus decentralized “models” outlined earlier. With the exception of Perm, access to social protection programs is fragmented. Families seeking multiple benefits potentially have to go to more than one center to apply for and receive them. Since each center tends to maintain its own data base, the same individual or family could have different information on the same item (e.g., income) in two or more data bases. Additionally, since most programs require the same information and verifications to determine eligibility for benefits, the household has to tell its story multiple times and have multiple copies of the same verifications. While there is no unique best solution, between the models observed the one in Perm and Tomsk—comprehensive offices serving a geographic district (or in a smaller place, the whole community)—seems preferable because it affords the opportunity to easily integrate application procedures for multiple programs and to improve case management.

Second, a thorough reform of the local civil service is needed to implement objective standards for hiring and promotion. It seems doubtful, however, that this will occur at the local level until there is reform at the federal level. And this seems some time away (Nunberg 1999b). The best hope in the near term may be the kind of training sketched in the final section to promote greater professionalism.<sup>18</sup> This could include formal evaluation of staff performance at a minimum.

*Intake Procedures - Appointment Systems.* Only one-third of the offices use appointments to schedule intake interviews. There are pros and cons to an appointment system. If it works effectively, applicants are not required to wait long hours to see a worker; and workers have a better idea of their workload for a given day. However, if too many potential applicants call for an appointment, appointments can be backed up for several weeks denying families access to benefits they need; and, if persons who have made appointments do not show up for them, the worker is left with time he could have used to interview another household. An appointment system also has the advantage of giving agency staff the possibility of fully informing

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<sup>18</sup> Doubtless, higher salaries could improve morale and probably productivity. But given the extremely low benefit levels and the fact that benefits are not paid



applicants about the documents they should bring to the in-take interview. On balance, moving to an appointment system seems desirable, although individual agencies should analyze their current intake numbers and patterns.

*Intake Procedures – Interviews.* All offices where interviews are conducted observed during this review contained from 3 to 7 workers in a cramped space. Desks were small with little space between them. There were no partitions between desks. Consequently client interviews are conducted not only in front of all other workers in the room, but in front of any other clients that are being interviewed by another worker in the room at the same time. This interview situation infringes on the right to confidentiality. Clients cannot provide the worker with personal information about their family's situation in confidence. As a consequence, they may not fully divulge their family's situation during the interview. Office workers and directors consistently complained about clients not telling the worker the truth about all of the income that they have. While a good interview held in confidence will not keep someone intent on lying to the worker from doing so, it does encourage other clients to provide all of the information that the worker needs to correctly determine the household's eligibility.

In an office where all workers are generic, i.e., each can handle applications for all programs in the center, and space is tight, staggered intake schedules and staggered administrative time (most agencies give all workers at least one day of administrative time on the same day of the week) could address this problem. This allows an agency to designate some small offices as interview spaces to be used on a rotating basis by workers assigned to intake for a specific day. At a minimum, partitions between desks would enhance if not guarantee the confidentiality of the interview.

*In-take Procedures – Verification.* Generally the housing allowance offices (HAOs) are more thorough in soliciting information about income and requiring documentation on the income sources identified<sup>19</sup> compared with

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consistently in many cities (Gallagher et al., 2000), it is difficult to argue for this as a priority.

<sup>19</sup> In its early years, the housing allowance program devoted considerable energy to the verification issue. It went so far as to develop profile of households who were likely to hid income from informal sources in an interview (using data from comprehensive household income surveys). In such cases where applicants were profiled as likely to be underreporting, HAOs were advised to add home visits and other checks to eligibility tests, as done in Novgorod. Shorter periods between

other programs. The HAO in Novgorod is particularly sedulous among the offices in the sample. But other HAOs also have strong procedures (Struyk, Lee, and Puzanov, 1997). In considering recommendations in this area, it is important to remember that for even most of the national-level programs, local governments determine what income is counted in determining eligibility and how it is verified. The exception, since 2000, is the child allowance program. Given this situation a realistic recommendation for improved verification is for other offices in a city to adopt the procedures of the local HAO. While not always stellar, they would certainly be a step forward. One should not, however, underestimate the challenges to gaining acceptance: programs fall under multiple committees with in the municipal administration and communication across agency lines is very limited.

*Supervision and Monitoring.* As a rule, i.e., in two-thirds of the offices, the workers report directly to the center director. For most centers the number of directly reporting workers would make it virtually impossible for the director to provide any meaningful supervision. Two offices have supervisors or an assistance director who provide supervision. In one other office lead workers provide some oversight; however, they always carry a full caseload.

Where absent, the addition of supervisory positions for every 6-8 workers would greatly enhance the operations of these agencies. Supervisors would perform the following functions that are either not being carried out now in most agencies, or are not being done as often or as well as needed.

- ✓ Training of new workers
- ✓ Mentoring ongoing workers and providing them with the answers to questions on complex cases so that those cases will be worked up correctly
- ✓ Setting worker expectations and conducting evaluations of performance
- ✓ Implementing a quality control process in city social protection agencies by monitoring the correctness of both approved cases (eligibility and benefit amounts) and those that have been denied, to

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recertifications were also recommended—in effect raising the cost of participation. For details see Holcomb and Puzanov (1996).

ensure that government funds used in social protection programs are being expended correctly.

✓ Helping the center director with organizational and work flow issues. All centers with at least four workers should develop a position description for a unit supervisor position and explore the possibility of funding such a position either out of the current budget or seek additional budget funds. The cities will also need to improve training in supervisory and management skills and techniques for new supervisors. (Overall training also needs to be greatly strengthened.)

At the same time, four offices do have procedures in place to provide quality control on cases processed. While this is a very important function, the information on error rates by type or by worker is not used as a management tool. Better procedures would include a standard share of all eligibility and payment determinations being subject to third-party review and records being maintained on error rates by staff member (and type of error). These records could be used as the basis for corrective discussions and as a factor in determining promotion rankings or even retention of consistently careless staff.

While the individual case audits described above are probably the most important monitoring activity that municipal social benefit agencies could undertake to improve performance, cities would do well to implement more comprehensive audits of agency operations to determine their effectiveness and efficiency. Such audits, conducted by an independent third party, could include items such as:

- Verification of reported case counts and case actions
- Reconciliation of benefits approved with benefits actually delivered
- Review of application denials to determine their correctness.

*Manuals and Procedural Guides.* Workers at the various centers have access to laws, and in some offices they have some procedures for program operations at their desks. No agency, however, has a comprehensive manual for workers on all program rules and procedures for doing their job. Such manuals would go a long way toward improving the effectiveness of the staff in doing their jobs. Not only would they standardize complex procedures, but they would lay out all the relevant rules and calculations that are necessary to determine eligibility and the benefit amount for all programs for

which the worker is responsible. Manuals also allow for quick updates when changes in rules or procedures occur. In short, the agencies should develop such manuals for its staff and keep them up to date.

*Appeal Procedures.* All cities, except Tomsk, have some form of an appeal process for all programs they administer. It is not clear how clients who are dissatisfied with a worker decision on their case become aware of their right to an appeal. All of the appeal processes involve high-level city administrators; for example, in the case of the Novgorod Housing Assistance Office, the Vice-Mayor. Clearly the arbitration of a single case is not the best way for these officials to be spending their time.

The appeal process for all programs in a city should be standardized as they are in Arzamas. Agencies should be required to provide applicant households whose applications are denied or whose ongoing cases are closed with a written notice explaining the reason for the action. This notice should also provide the household with instructions for filing an appeal if they do not agree with the decision.

It would be reasonable for cities to designate staff as appeal hearing officers who would be charged with conducting the hearing and rendering a decision. It is likely that legislation would have to be passed to delegate this responsibility to a city employee. These employees would, while working for the Social Protection Committee Head, have to be given independence.

*Computerization.* All offices visited have some degree of computerization in their office. Systems for the most part collect information on client households, though some systems calculate eligibility and benefit levels for the workers. Overall computerization is limited and too often they are not deployed to improve the efficiency of the office's main functions. More computers are needed. At least as important, they should be programmed to permit direct entry of data during intake interviews, maintain data files in a way that they are easily accessed by staff, be linked to data files of other agencies to facilitate verification of income level and other aspects of eligibility, and produce reports that are of value to the line workers and supervisors as well as to higher management and the Finance Committee.

*Management Reporting.* All of the centers produce reports either manually or from a computer database. These reports are generally those required by a higher authority, and managers at the center and Social

Committee level use them as best they can to determine how well their centers are operating. *Ad hoc* reports are produced to meet specific needs of the municipal and *oblast* committees.

Managers need to define their data needs so that meaningful reports that will help them do their job can be produced. Often reports for the Oblast or federal government have only summary level data that do not provide enough information, or contain so much data, that the manager is unable to determine what is significant. The following are desirable types of reports that should be available to office directors: reports that tell workloads by worker; predict upcoming workloads, e.g., the number of reviews that are coming due in the following two months, that will help managers ensure that workloads are distributed equitably and that the job can get done; monitoring reports on case quality done by supervisors provides concrete evidence needed to conduct performance evaluations for individual workers.

**Action at the national level.** The burden of the results of our review of procedures at these nine administrative offices is that public administration practices are generally primitive in the social sector at the client service level. Improving this situation will require significant resources and national and local leadership.

At the national level, the cognizant deputy prime minister and the minister of labor and social welfare must make a clear commitment to improving administrative practices and establishing and supporting a new joint federal-oblast-municipal commission that would provide continuing leadership. Ministry officials and consultants, possibly provided by the donor community, would staff the commission and take the lead in implementing the action program developed by the commission. Reports like this one and testimonials from high performing municipal agencies would be the starting point for the commission's deliberations.

In terms of a concrete program, information on general public administration and efficient office management practices would be disseminated along with the specifics of the administration of means-tested programs. Office administration would include such topics as job descriptions, routine work monitoring, delegation of authority, supervisory skills, personnel management, planning, training for new employees, the necessity of comprehensive program procedure manuals (kept current),

record keeping, full cost accounting, how to get the most from office computers, and reporting to higher level officials. With respect to means-testing, one would have to begin with motivating agencies to shift to such testing. For example, Gallagher (2000) has demonstrated that over half the poor would not receive benefits if the standard categories were used to determine who receives social assistance. Grants to those income-eligible could be substantially increased from the savings to stopping subsidies to the well-to-do.

Easily digested modules could be prepared, with administration of one or two income-tested programs used throughout as examples binding the modules together. It would be important to be very clear on the legal justification for all changes from standard current practices and to explain where federal law permits local initiative.

Publication could be through both the internet and in printed form. Our survey shows that few offices administering social service programs have an internet connection, although they have access to an internet-connected computer in another office. So it is important not to overestimate the possibilities in this direction. With the dearth of internet connections, an accent should be on the quality of downloaded papers, which will be the more common way to study the contents of the site.

Printed materials should be printed in large volume, as it is usually too much to expect agencies to make copies for their staff. The production and distribution of these materials could be supported by a large-scale training program. Realistically, one-week training programs should be delivered in every significant city and at the *oblast* level for *raion* officials. The office director and most staff should attend to maximize the impact of the training would use the same materials on the internet, which could be updated for changes in federal laws. Over time, the curricula of these training sessions could be modified to standard course formats and new courses offered by local continuing education institutions.

Certainly the recommendations in this section are sweeping. But the primitive nature of administrative practices in most localities requires nothing less. Can Russia afford to invest in better administration—staff training, more computers, preparation of program guidelines? Would not these funds be better spent on the poor? The trade-off is not as stark as it may seem at first. Better trained, more productive and professional agency

employees are likely to do better in targeting assistance and in case management. Improvements like a unified application and record keeping system would cut required staff time significantly. At least as important, the chances of programs being administered and benefits targeted as intended in the relevant laws would be enhanced. Most of what is suggested is in the nature of one-off training expenses to be funded at the Federation level. Current incremental costs should be quite modest.

Happily there are good examples within Russia on which to draw in preparing the necessary materials. This will make the lessons to be transferred less alien than might otherwise be the case. More importantly, most of those interviewed were interested in better ways to do their jobs.

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